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ABSTRACT

Because most studies investigating psychological profiles of subjects convicted of driving under the influence of alcohol (DUI) have been conducted at the time of arrest or treatment, it is unclear whether subjects' anxiety, depression, and hostility represent "trait" characteristics central to alcohol abuse or "state" responses to arrest and treatment. A study was conducted to examine affective, cognitive, and behavioral characteristics of individuals arrested for alcohol-related offenses. Self-report demographic questionnaires and psychological inventories were completed by 32 males who had a history of arrest for DUI or public intoxication and by 32 matched comparison subjects. The results indicated that alcohol-specific variables such as social and escapist reasons for drinking and severity of problems associated with consumption were superior to measures of emotional distress and sensation seeking in predicting group membership. The two groups were not found to differ significantly on measures of depression, anxiety, or self-esteem. Moreover, self-reported average alcohol intake did not signficantly distinguish between arrest and comparison groups. These findings suggest that alcohol offenders may be distinguished from nonoffenders less by their patterns of alcohol consumption or psychological distress than by maladaptive beliefs about the appropriate use of alcohol. These offenders might benefit from cognitive behavioral therapies. (NB)

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CHARACTERISTICS OF MALE ALCOHOL OFFENDERS

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Characteristics of Male Alcohol Offenders

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ABSTRACT: This study examined affective, cognitive, and behavioral characteristics of individuals arrested for alcohol-related offenses. Self-report information was obtained from 32 males who had a history of arrest for driving under the influence of alcohol or public intoxication and 32 matched comparison subjects. Results indicated that alcohol-specific variables such as social and escapist reasons for drinking and severity of problems associated with consumption were superior to measures of emotional distress and sensation seeking in prediction group membership. The two groups were not found to differ significantly on measures of depression, anxiety, or self-esteem. Moreover, self-reported average alcohol intake did not significantly distinguish between arrest and comparison groups.

The need for more appropriate relapse prevention strategies with problem drinkers and drunk drivers has been stressed by many researchers (Donovan and Chaney, 1985; Selzer et al., 1977). Studies investigating the personalitites of men arrested for driving under the influence of alcohol (DUI) typically have compared these subjects to controls and/or to diagnosed alcoholics or have identified subtypes in the DUI population. Male DUI offenders have been found to have lower self-esteem, greater anxiety and depression, and elevated levels of hostility when compared to normal control subjects (Steer, 1982). Selzer and Barton (1977) found that their DUI sample fell between controls and alcoholics on some dimensions, but resembled alcoholics in exhibiting irresponsible attitudes, aggressiveness, and use of drugs to cope with stress.

Because most studies have investigated psychological profiles of DUI subjects at the time of arrest and treatment, it is unclear whether their anxiety, depression, and hostility are "trait" characteristics which play a causal role in alcohol abuse, or whether negative affect is a short-term "state" response to arrest and court-ordered treatment. Research on heavy drinking male college students (Schwarz et al., 1979; Ratliff and Burkhart, 1984; Segal et al., 1980) and on male college students who later became alcoholics (Loper et al., 1973) suggests that impulsivity and sensation seeking may be more predictive of alcohol abuse than measures of psychological distress.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the value of various affective, cognitive, and behavioral variables in the prediction of alcohol-related arrest. It was hypothesized that sensation seeking and alcohol specific attitudes and behaviors could be better predictors of a history of arrest than negative affective features such as anxiety and depression.

Method

Subjects

The offender group consisted of 32 men reporting at least one arrest for an alcohol-related offense. Sixteen were participating in court-ordered outpatient treatment through a local community mental health center following arrest for driving under the influence of alcohol (DUI), and the other 16 were members of the Army National Guard who acknowledged having been arrested at least once for either DUI or public intoxication. While information was unavailable on the numbers in each category, probabilities from state arrest statistics suggest that at least 13 of the 16 were arrested for DUI. Since univariate analyses of variance on all dependent measures revealed no significant differences between these two groups, they were combined to form the offender group.

The comparison groups consisted of 32 National Guardsmen who denied any previous alcohol-related arrests, matched with the offender group on age and education. Mean ages for offenders and controls were 29.4 and 27.0, respectively, and mean education levels were 12.6 and 12.7 years, respectively. All subjects were white.

Measures and procedures

All subjects received the same battery of questionnaires. After completing a consent form and a demographic data sheet,

subjects were administered a set of psychological inventories which included the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) (Beck, 1967), the Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965), Form X of the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI) (Spielberger, 1970), and Form V of the Sensation Seeking Scale (SSS-V) (Zuckerman, 1979). These questionnaires were administered in counterbalanced order.

Subjects then completed a set of questionnaires on alcohol-specific attitudes and behaviors, consisting of a measure of alcohol-related problems, the Michigan Alcoholism Screening Test (MAST) (Selzer, 1971), the Reasons for Drinking Scale (Farber et al., 1980), and a standardized measure of alcohol consumption, the Khavari Alcohol Test (KAT) (Khavari and Farber, 1978). These scales were also arranged in counterbalanced order.

Results

Means, standard deviations and F values from three multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVA) comparing the 32 alcohol offenders to the 32 control subjects are presented in Table 1. MANOVA revealed no significant difference between the offender and comparison groups on measures of psychological distress, including depression, anxiety, and self-esteem. MANOVA also indicated no overall significant difference on the sensation seeking variables of experience seeking, boredom susceptibility, disinhibition, and need for thrill and adventure.

However, significant MANOVA group differences were obtained on alcohol-specific variables, including social reasons for drinking, escapist reasons for drinking, and problems due to alcohol use. On the Reasons for Drinking Scale, arrest subjects reported significantly more social and escapist reasons for drinking. On the MAST, they reported significantly more alcohol-related problems than controls. Interestingly, although the mean standardized alcohol intake measures from the KAT appeared higher for offenders than for control subjects, this difference did not reach statistical significance ($p < .092$).

Multiple discriminant function analysis using Wilks's method was conducted to determine which measures best predicted group membership. A significant discriminant function was obtained ($p < .002$). Measures contributing most to the discrimination were the MAST, social reasons for drinking, and escapist reasons

for drinking. Using these three variables alone, the discriminant analysis correctly classified 48 of the 64 cases or 75.0%. Including all other dependent measures in the analysis improved the "hit rate" only sightly, to 78.1%

Discussion

This study suggests that alcohol-specific variables such as beliefs about the effects of alcohol and continued alcohol use in spite of problematic social, health, and financial consequences best distinguish alcohol offenders from controls. Such psychological characteristics as sensation seeking and emotional distress were less relevant in predicting offender group membership. Reasons for drinking and consequences of alcohol use also were more useful than a self-report measure of alcohol intake in predicting pathological drinking patterns such as driving under the influence of alcohol.

While this study needs to be replicated with studies using larger samples, these results suggest that alcohol offenders (especially DUI offenders) may be distinguished from nonoffenders less by their patterns of alcohol consumption or psychological distress than by maladaptive beliefs about the appropriate use of alcohol. Cognitive behavioral therapies tailored to address such cognitive characteristics might prove useful in reducing the frequency of drunken driving and other alcohol-related offenses.

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Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and F Values from Multivariate Analyses of Variance Comparing 32 Alcohol Offenders to 32 Control Subjects

Measure	Alcohol Offenders M	Alcohol Offenders SD	Control Subjects M	Control Subjects SD	F
Emotional Distress					1.38
Depression	7.56	6.93	6.00	9.41	.57
State Anxiety	39.80	9.63	36.10	7.54	2.91
Trait Anxiety	39.10	9.93	34.40	6.94	4.92*
Self-Esteem	31.80	4.43	33.30	3.85	2.27
Sensation Seeking					1.20
Experience Seeking	4.53	2.14	3.56	1.64	4.12*
Boredom Susceptibility	3.09	1.80	2.91	2.04	.15
Disinhibition	4.59	2.47	3.69	2.81	1.87
Thrill and Adventure	6.75	3.60	5.97	2.34	1.26
Alcohol Variables					6.06***
Social Drinking	2.94	1.46	1.47	1.70	13.73***
Escapist Drinking	3.19	2.91	1.03	2.02	11.83***
MAST	6.91	3.95	3.03	2.71	21.00***
Alcohol Intake	449.50	413.00	261.70	463.90	2.92

*indicates $p < .05$ **indicates $p < .01$ ***indicates $p < .001$